

## Milk Glass Moon by maplemood

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**Summary:**

“Hey, stranger.” If he sounds snide, well. Those six months aren’t going anywhere.

Kali flicks her eyes up, from the worn cuffs of his jeans to the raw patch on his chin. Her mouth twists. “Christ. What’ve you done with your hair?”

## Milk Glass Moon

### Author's Note:

- For [TolkienGirl](#).

Happy belated birthday!! I really hope you enjoy this. :)

She gives him one night's notice. Through a collect call out of Indianapolis, no less.

It's just like her. Unexpected, unconcerned, and so goddamn selfish it makes Steve's blood boil. He'd be white-knuckling the phone like a champ, bawling down the line about those *Six months, six goddamn months; did you ever stop to think how fucking worried we were, did you ever stop ?* if he hadn't been—wait for it—so goddamn fucking worried.

"Kals?"

She laughs, probably remembering how much she used to hate that nickname, how convinced she was that he was just being cruel. Stripping her down to everything she couldn't be—sweet, stable, a small-town girl from a small-town family who'd think twice about getting blood on her hands. "Hello, Steve."

"Kals," he repeats, hating the way he sags against the wall like relief alone is enough to bowl him over. "Now's not a good time."

"Why?"

"Because," he snaps, "if you show your face in Hawkins again—and I am serious about this—I'm going after it with a fucking bat."

"I see." This laugh bursts out in a crinkle of static. It works double duty, painting Steve's vision red and stoking the tiny, treacherous warmth in his gut.

"Don't laugh! This is serious, okay? Sincere. I'm being goddamn sincere!"

"Of course. You always are." She yawns. "I think I'll take my chances, Harrington."

"Kali," he snarls.

"If it's all the same to you."

Steve stops. Sighs. "The six a.m. bus?" he finally asks.

"As always."

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First off, the apartment's a wreck. Whatever her faults, Mom always knew when to nag him to get his shit in order, a talent Steve didn't inherit. Now he scrambles, loading up the dishwasher, taking out the trash, shoving wrinkled shirts into his closet and girly magazines under his mattress. His bat joins the shirts at the back of the closet; his D&D manual and the specialty miniature the kids ordered for his last birthday keep their places of honor on the nightstand. He hits the sack around twelve, is up again by five.

Thank Christ it's a Saturday.

Their town's one and only bus station hunches nearly abandoned under the first streaks of early-morning light. Steve isn't expecting a tidal wave, Hawkins being no tourist hotspot, even in its demodog free stretches, but somehow he still isn't prepared for the sight of her clambering down alone. No luggage, not even a purse; she's thinner than he remembers, her face worn and grim. Steve hops off Shadowfax's hood (it was Will who named the car, and Dustin who made sure the name stuck), stomping out the butt of his second cigarette before meeting her halfway.

"Hey, stranger." If he sounds snide, well. Those six months aren't going anywhere.

Kali flicks her eyes up, from the worn cuffs of his jeans to the raw patch on his chin. Her mouth twists. "Christ. What've you done with your hair?"

"Yeah, the red doesn't suit you, either," he hears himself snap.

“Should have stuck with purple.”

Her eyes narrow. “Fuck you.”

She steps forward. He steps forward. Both blundering through a pulled-tense, biting moment that comes down to one of two things: a hug, or a slap in the face. Steve’s half-braced for the slap when his arms wrap around her. *Her*, here, so warm and solid, so present that not burying his face in the curve of her neck and inhaling like a weirdo is about the maximum of what he can do right now. Instead, he settles for the cherry-streaked swoop of her hair. “Hairspray ran out. Farrah Fawcett failed me.”

“That bitch.” Kali squeezes back, curling one hand softly to the base of his neck. She doesn’t smell good. Stale cigarettes, staler breath. A shit-masked-by-Lysol tang from the bus toilet. She smells like a homecoming, and Steve treasures that, even if he’s not about to bottle it up and sell it.

For a minute, she lets him. Then Kali pulls away to kiss his chin, just above the jawline where it’s scraped red and raw. She uses her teeth; it’s a nip more than anything else and it stings. “That was for the thing about the bat.” She doesn’t snap. Her face is dead-serious but completely calm, free of judgement.

Steve hisses. “Yeah? How about that thing of you never calling for half the damn year? What do you get for that, Kals?”

“I’m sure you’ll think of something,” she says, with a shrug and again that same dead-calm, an acceptance that’s never failed to impress him, no matter how pissed he is. If she’s selfish, and vengeful, and lugging around one hell of a chip on her shoulder, Kali has never pretended otherwise. He’s spent so long trying to change himself that some days he isn’t sure who Steve Harrington is anymore; she’s always been herself. Nothing more and nothing less.

“Well, when you put it that way...” He shakes his head, staring—they’ll both pretend it’s because he can’t believe her, not because he can’t believe she’s finally here, in front of him again, and almost can’t stand to look away. “Shit,” he says. Like a broken record: “Shit, I missed you.”

She dips her head. "I missed you, too." As always, she sounds ticked off, at herself for admitting it, at him for bringing her to the point where she needs to admit it.

Not much, maybe. But Steve's learned to grab hold of what he can get. "You want something to eat?" he asks.

"Mmmm." She yawns so widely it reminds him of those huge snakes that can unhinge their jaws to swallow an entire cow. "I need to see Jane."

"You think?" But he's too tired for this, they both are. She's here, he's here, they're both here together, let's have that be enough for now, okay? "We can stop at my place first," Steve says through a yawn of his own. "Let's go."

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He drives her home. The first home they've had to come back to; before it was all dingy motel rooms and the cramped bedstead in Hopper's cabin. Kali tells him that the mustardy-yellow wallpaper Steve's landlord apparently thinks is the height of style looks like "a baby's first shit," before collapsing onto his mattress.

"A nice baby, though," she mumbles, stretching with a half-grunt, half-groan until some part of her is touching every corner of the bed. "Like you."

"Like me?" Steve sits on the edge to pull off his sneakers. "Geez, how long has it been since you slept?"

"Don't be stupid. Baby face." Kali tugs at the back of his t-shirt until he swivels toward her, then reaches up and pats his cheek. Magnanimously—the same way Dustin thumped him on the shoulder when he finally started to get the point of leveling up in D&D. "You've got a baby face, Steve," she says, shifting to make room for him. It's really a ridiculously small bed. Came with the place, so he hasn't bothered replacing it yet, but now that—

*Don't count on it.* She won't be staying. Not longer than a couple nights, and that's if he's lucky.

He stretches out beside her, arms behind his head. The bus station isn't far from the Red Dragon Takeout, which Steve's apartment is slotted right over like a shoebox. It's six-forty, maybe seven. Weak sunlight starts to trickle through his lopsided blinds, staining the room a watery pink. Kali curls closer to him, rests her cheek against his shoulder. "I like your face," she says, then scrunches up her nose, shakes her head. "Wait. No. Not what I meant."

"Hey, I'll take it."

"Your place. I like your place," she corrects, yawns again, and flickers her fingers out to encompass the entire musty, mustardy room. "It's cozy."

"So, not your style."

He isn't sure if he means it as a jab or not. Luckily, Kali's too tired to take it as one. "Well, it's not bitchin'," she admits, and suddenly they're both cracking up, smothering their laughs in his pillow. Steve wraps his arms around Kali's quivering sides and pulls her close in one quick lunge (*stealthy, like a ninja*), and she—fine, she doesn't squeal, exactly, Kali never squeals. She does let out a breathless, pleased kind of sound that settles low in Steve's belly and warms him like nothing else.

"No, okay—stop squirming, *Jesus*, just—c'mere. Okay." Finally they settle on their sides, big spoon and little spoon. His arm will be numb before he knows it, but for now Steve doesn't care. He closes his eyes and buries his face in Kali's hair. He loves her hair. The first thing he noticed about her, actually. Multicolored highlights aren't exactly all the rage in Hawkins, probably not even in Indianapolis, and her undercut's the kind of thing that would make his mom cry, but...it suits her. Suits her better than almost any haircut or outfit Steve's tried out for himself over the years, because it fits. Everything about Kali fits.

God only knows how she does it.

"What about your parents?" she says now, like she's read his mind. For all he knows, she did. Kali insists that she and Eleven can't swap over powers, that's not how it works, but some days he has his

suspicions. “Can’t imagine they’re crazy about their only son living over a takeout joint.”

“Best takeout joint in Hawkins, I’ll have you know.” He raises his head. “But no. They’re not.”

It should hurt. It doesn’t really, though. Not anymore.

“Steve,” Kali says quietly. He wonders how hard she’s biting back her usual spiel about how ordinary people will never be able to accept the ones like them, the ones who’ve seen worse and been through worse than they’d ever want to imagine. *They don’t know you, Steve. They can’t save you.*

Last time she started in on him, he was that killer combination of pissed and sloshed: *Yeah, sorry to break it to you, but I’m not the one who was fucking grown in a lab, all right?* Glass shattering—one of them threw something, who and what doesn’t matter. What matters is that when he woke up Kali was gone, and she’s stayed gone until now.

*I’m not the one who’s alone, and I’m not going to be lonely with you.*

“Was it because of me?”

*You didn’t help*, he could say, and it wouldn’t be a total a lie. Wouldn’t be the total truth, either, and what else matters?

“It’s okay,” Steve says instead. He tugs a finger through one of her red highlights. “I’m over it.”

“You don’t get over something like that.”

He draws his fingers through, combing the tangled strands away from her face, behind her ear. “Kals,” he says. “What happened?”

She shrugs.

“Come on. Talk to me.”

“You know I don’t come here to talk about those things,” she says. Dead-calm again, no anger but the line’s drawn and she’s warning

him not to cross it. Steve bites his tongue.

Another time. He's not giving up. She knows that. Just...yielding, for now. Screaming fights might be the truest sign of passion in a relationship, but their shine wears off pretty damn quick. "Fine." He rests his chin on her shoulder. "What do you want to talk about?"

She sighs, all the tension leaving her body at once. Kali turns her face to his with a heavy-eyed smile. "How about babysitting?"

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They talk. They sleep. They wake up and talk again.

He loses count of the time—it's nine? Ten, ten-thirty? Steve tells her about Eleven's (*Jane's*) swimming lessons, Joyce's promotion, the Party's newest campaign, Hopper's latest diet. About the Fourth of July celebration that's happening in only a couple weeks, how he's already promised to cart the kids to Larry's Drive-In two towns over to catch a double feature and watch the fireworks. How he knows for a fact they're planning on sneaking a six-pack of Hopper's beer along, and, sure, he did exactly the same thing when he was their age, but his dad wasn't Hopper, and his dad also wouldn't have beaten the ass of the chaperone who let Steve get away with drinking said beer, so, yeah, it's a problem...

Small-time stuff. Petty shit. Marks him as the most boring person in the universe, probably, or the most boring person in Hawkins, which is at least an accomplishment, but Kali craves it. She's never had the luxury of being bored, of caring about whether she'll pass summer classes, get a job, buy a house of her own. It's the one thing he knows better than her, the one thing he can do for her. So Steve's happy to oblige.

In return, she shows him fantastic, wild things, all the wonders he can't make for himself. "What do you want to talk about?" is his question, always will be. Hers is "What do you want to see?"

He's put in requests before. This time he lies back, his lids drooping, his throat dry. "Doesn't matter. Lay some magic on me."



Kali rolls her eyes. “Got it,” she says, propping herself up on one elbow. “One order of magic coming right up.”

Something on the nightstand rattles.

It’s a milk glass, greenish with a lumpy cow embossed over the front, that Steve picked up at a yard sale. In fact, it’s one of the two glasses he owns, so he’s about to tell her to be careful with it when the glass hops off the nightstand’s edge, light as a bird, and sails into the air. It looks a little Disney at first, a little cartoony, like it’s about to sprout spun-glass wings or twitter out a song. Instead, it bubbles and slumps in on itself, rolling into a molten, glowing ball. Then it begins to spin.

“Kal—” he starts. She bats an absent hand over his mouth.

“Watch.”

The ball spins, faster and faster. A new glow blooms in its center, deeper and cooler, unfolding petal by petal until the air around them shines with soft, clear light. It stops spinning for a couple seconds, hanging suspended over their heads, pure light now, the glass gone, blooming brighter, brighter, until finally...

It bursts.

Fireworks, pinwheels, tiny glittering shooting-star streaks: they all dart through the room, drop to the bedsheets, raise the hairs on Steve’s arms when they coat them in silver and gold like Tinkerbell’s dust. A little gritty, a little electric, cold as snow...he really feels like he might fly, just take off into the air that’s gone soft and dusky as a summer night, until he looks across and sees Kali’s hair and arms powdered with the same glow, her lips frosted in diamond dust. They quirk, brush closer. “So, Harrington? Was that magical enough for you?”

His head and stomach both just a little too light, Steve thumbs away the thin trail of blood under her nose. “Groovy.”

She frowns. “That’s it? Groovy?”

He wipes his thumb with the hem of his t-shirt. “What was it, uh...a disco ball?”

The frown turns to disbelief. “You idiot!”

The powder still glittering across his arms prickles. “I didn’t say it wasn’t cool.”

“It was supposed to be a *moon*.” Kali smacks his arm, a snort bubbling out through her lips. “A glass moon.”

Oh. Oh yeah, yeah, he sees that. Definitely. “Beautiful moon,” Steve says, and reaches for her. “Beautiful disco ball, too.”

She snorts. “God, I hate you.”

God, he missed her.

The kiss starts slow, nudges in showers of stinging sparks, and it’s not like kissing Nance, or any of the other girls he’s been with over the years—the same electricity is there, the same rush and hunger and need, but underneath it all is something deeper, rooted and rock-solid. Kali combs her fingers through his hair, fingernails tracing across his scalp, down to the tingling nape of Steve’s neck. He slips his fingers beneath the hem of her shirt, tracing the same patterns, blunter and deeper, across her ribs and the softness of her belly. Then she’s rolled over, inviting, and Steve has one knee on either side of her hips and he’s bending to kiss her again, again and again, in this swirl of not-quite-burning, not-quite-magical sparks, and if that’s not a fucking pointed metaphor for what they’ve got, he doesn’t know what is. Doesn’t know how he got by without her, for the last six months or ever before. Doesn’t know how he’ll be able to let her go.

And he thinks, like he always does in these moments, that he will, he has before, and it’ll be okay—maybe, just maybe, they can make this work. If she can be his wonder and he can be her rock, her small-town guy with the baby face and the bat in his closet, maybe they’re both giving as much as they take and maybe that’s enough.

He needs to know what drove her back. She needs to know what she’s running from or she’ll never heal. She needs him to be here for her, more than anything else, and Steve may still not have the first clue to what he’s doing, with himself or with his life, but, shit, he can at least do that. They don’t have to be lonely. Sometimes she just

needs them to be alone together.

“Mmmm.” They’re both losing themselves; the last sparks flicker out and the light brightens back up as Kali catches Steve’s bottom lip between her teeth. It’s the light, though, that brings him back to the present. Steve returns the favor, deepens the kiss for another minute. “You’re killing me, Kals,” he mutters against her half-open lips. Then (and it’s not like he enjoys this part, matter of fact, it’s one of the hardest things he’s ever done), he rolls off her, smacking her hip none too gently in the process. “We’re burning daylight. Come on.”

It takes him another minute or so on the side of the bed to get himself together, while Kali’s scrambling up, half-dazed, too, cheated and pissed. “Harrington—”

“Ele—Jane’s going to kill us if we don’t get over to the chief’s today.” Not that he wouldn’t love wasting the rest of today in his crappy tiny bed with her, and the next day and the next. There’s nothing smooth in the grin he flashes, not even a hint of King Steve, but what the hell. He tried. “Hey, you said I’d think of something.”

*Never calling for half the damn year? What do you get for that?*

(Okay, so maybe he kind of does enjoy it.)

“I fucking hate you,” she breathes, lunging, and when it comes to avoiding the hard, bruising kiss pressed to his cheek before heading for the kitchen and the phone, swiping the empty milk glass off his nightstand as he does—yeah, Steve doesn’t stand a chance.

### **Author's Note:**

I have lots of feelings when it comes to Steve being the easygoing small-town guy who can give Kali some of the sense of normality her life so obviously lacks otherwise. Like, SO MANY FEELINGS.